

FINAL EVALUATION

MLI/803

Recovery of the Local Economy and Community Support (Phase II)

PROJECT SUMMARY DATA

Country	Mali
Long project title	Recovery of the Local Economy and Community Support – Phase II
Short project title	RELAC II
LuxDev Code	MLI/803
Version of the Report	October 2019

RATING OF THE PROJECT BY THE EVALUATION MISSION

Global rating (Effectiveness)	3 On a scale of 1 (excellent results, significantly better than expected) to 6 (the project was unsuccessful, or the situation has deteriorated on balance)
Rating using other evaluation criteria	Relevance: 2 Efficiency: 2-3 Sustainability: 3

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of the RELAC II project (MLI/803), funded by the European Union Emergency Trust Fund, is to stabilise and fight against the root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa. Its aim is to “continue the stabilisation of targeted post-conflict areas by helping to regenerate the local economy and improve the services provided by local authorities”. It is an extension of the RELAC I project (MLI/802), whose overall objective was exactly the same. As set down in the Financial and Technical Document, RELAC II has been extended to cover 30 municipalities of the four regions. Of these 30 municipalities, 12 were already covered by RELAC I and 18 new municipalities were identified from the Timbuktu, Gao, Ménaka and Taoudéni regions.

LuxDev commissioned ARTEMIS in April 2019 to carry out a final evaluation over a six-month period of the RELAC II project. ARTEMIS mobilised essentially the same team that carried out the mid-term evaluation: Virginie Kremer, project manager, evaluator and coordinator, Mohamadou Sy, regional evaluator and head of mission, and Abdourahmane Touré, national expert. The field mission ran from 19 June to 3 July at Bamako and in the Timbuktu and Gao regions. The main results expected in terms of this evaluation were as follows: **R1** A description of the results achieved/not achieved and the area covered (in consideration of the risks and hypotheses and the monitoring carried out); **R2** An analysis and assessment of the project’s management and methods (monitoring methods, partnerships, methodological changes, coordination, limitations encountered); **R3** An evaluation based on four Development Aid Committee-Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development criteria; **R4** An assessment of the project’s impact (on stabilisation, economic regeneration, capacities of the regional authorities) and proposed solutions for the stabilisation of Northern Mali; **R5** An analysis of a list of specific issues concerning the mechanisms to ensure the sustainability of the lessons learned and a detailed overview of the project in respect with the recommendations of the mid-term evaluation (federative projects, employment of young people, transition of associations, mobilisation of State officials, environmental studies, training, capitalisation); **R6** A list of lessons learned and recommendations for similar future projects (knowledge management, lessons learned in post-crisis situations).

The RELAC II project aims to continue “the stabilisation of targeted post-conflict areas by helping to regenerate the local economy and improve the services provided by local authorities” (overall objective). The purpose of the project is to consolidate the progress made in terms of rehabilitation of the facilities/equipment of the local authorities and support for microprojects implemented in the municipalities targeted by RELAC I, but also to help reinforce the skills of the local authorities in terms of the quality of the services provided to the populations. Its specific objectives are: 1. the local economy is regenerated; 2. the supported local authorities are able to better fulfil their responsibilities towards the populations.

After having drawn on the experience of RELAC I and having accounted for the main recommendations of the RELAC II mid-term evaluation, the final evaluation mission is of the opinion that the RELAC II project **has contributed to achieving the overall objective** by supporting the regeneration of the economy, reinforcing the skills of the local players and improving the services provided to the populations by the regional authorities. However, the exact measurement of this contribution to the overall objective presupposes the availability of data drawn from the update of the project’s logical framework matrix, by comparing the target values of the indicators of the endline situation with those obtained during the baseline study. This update work was in progress at the time of the project’s final evaluation. The overall objective of the project remains ambitious and complex due to the institutional and security situation in the north of the country, on the one hand, and the extent of needs in terms of wealth creation and social services, on the other.

The evaluation mission believes that the **project has contributed to the regeneration of the local economy**. The project has led, among other things, to the recruitment of three local operators, and the funding of 98 microprojects amounting to EUR 3 217 000 (EUR 472 000 for microproject identification and EUR 2 745 000 for implementation), which is 32% of the project’s resources. 93% of contracts have been awarded to Malian persons/companies, the majority of which from the regions of the north. The regeneration of the local economy, however, in a precarious political and institutional context and a situation of volatile security aggravated by the delay in the implementation of the peace agreement, is both complex and difficult. Regenerating the local economy also requires the implementation of structured programmes with the consequent funding, and the development of value chains, which cooperation alone cannot bring about, despite committing a substantial budget of EUR 10 million.

In terms of the **specific objective 2**, the project's response is satisfactory because:

- overall, the priority needs identified have been satisfied, despite delays in the delivery of certain infrastructures;
- the municipalities have been supported in the management of rehabilitated infrastructures and facilities to ensure their sustainability;
- the project has contributed to revitalising the management committees and building their capacities.

However, whilst equipping local authorities, rehabilitating buildings and building the capacities of elected representatives and officials are very important, they are not sufficient alone to enable local authorities to better fulfil their responsibilities towards the populations. The regional authorities must, in effect, have their own resources so they can contribute long-term to the funding of their social, economic and cultural development plans and ensure the maintenance of their facilities and their infrastructures.

The number of municipalities **covered** in the Taoudéni and Ménaka regions is low compared with the Gao and Timbuktu regions, but it should also be noted that the Programme Management Unit has remained faithful to the guidelines of the Financial and Technical Document and its intervention logic, which is based on a certain degree of flexibility. RELAC II identified and supported the formulation of 98 microprojects, which include young people, women and nomad populations, which were not adequately taken into account in RELAC I.

Result 1: Local economic projects are supported. 98 local economic microprojects were selected and formulated, 87 in the project's 18 new intervention municipalities and 11 in the RELAC I intervention municipalities. five microprojects for the Gao region and six microprojects for the Timbuktu region are led exclusively by young people. In the Timbuktu, Taoudéni and Gao regions, there are on average three to four microprojects per municipality. In the Ménaka region, there are fewer than two microprojects per municipality. The Timbuktu region has the largest number of microprojects (48%). On 25.06.2019, a total of 2 273 microproject management structure members had been trained. The number of people trained in the Timbuktu and Gao regions is essentially the same. Trained women, however, represent 62.67% of beneficiaries for the Gao and Ménaka regions, compared with just 16.80% for the Timbuktu and Taoudéni regions. This factor is linked to the nature of the organisations: there are more mixed male-female organisations in the Gao region. Agriculture in its broadest sense (35.71% for rice growing and 28.57% for vegetable growing) and livestock farming are the dominant activities, representing respectively 64.28% and 24.49% of the microprojects supported. The 98 microprojects cover seven areas of activity. In the Timbuktu region, rice growing is the predominant activity of the microprojects, followed by livestock farming. There is no fish farming activity. In the Gao region, vegetable growing is the predominant activity of the microprojects. In total, EUR 3 217 000 has been spent identifying and implementing the 98 microprojects, with a budget overrun of 15.8% in respect of the EUR 2 777 000 budgeted for 120 microprojects. RELAC II's contribution is therefore on average EUR 32 826 per microproject. The operating revenues vary from one region to the next. The microprojects of the Timbuktu region differ largely from the other three regions, with relatively satisfactory results. This is followed by the Taoudéni region. The microprojects of the other regions are faced with major problems that impact on their profitability. A big difference is seen between the different regions' operating data, despite essentially the same basic investment.

Result 2: The most urgent material needs of the local authorities in their missions to support the populations are covered. This support represents a continuation of the material support activities implemented as part of RELAC I. The material needs of the 18 new intervention municipalities of RELAC II, in terms of the rehabilitation of basic social infrastructures and facilities, were identified by a participatory approach. They then underwent analysis by the local committee in charge of orienting, coordinating and monitoring development actions and were then approved by the municipal councils. The project received a mandate from the local authorities concerned to implement the selected proposals. This was carried out by the contracting authority delegated for the implementation phase, based on the procedures of LuxDev, which were considered to be faster than those of the State to which the regional authorities are subject. The project has certainly made significant progress in terms of infrastructures and facilities, but delays are noted in the completion of certain infrastructures and the delivery of certain facilities, above all in the Taoudéni region. The project has also contributed to the organisational reinforcement of the microproject management structures. The municipalities have received support in the management of rehabilitated infrastructures and facilities. The municipal authorities have been trained in the importance of having budgetary provisions for the maintenance and repair of the buildings. Advice has also been given to the heads of the management committees on the importance of maintaining the facilities.

Result 3: The local authorities are supported in the fulfilment of their responsibilities towards the populations. A participatory and inclusive approach has allowed for the identification of the priority training needs of the elected representatives and personnel of the 18 new regional authorities to be completed. Supporting the 30 local authorities also focused on the training of the elected representatives and officials, and the organisation of community debates on the missions of the administration, the link between the administration and the populations of the north and, lastly, the strategies to improve the services provided to the populations. 11 training modules were identified, grouped into three subject areas:

- decentralisation and regionalisation;
- general operation of the local authorities;
- governance and regulation.

A marked interest for decentralisation is noted in the Taoudéni region, and a marked interest for general operation in the Timbuktu region. Placed under the responsibility of the municipal councils, debates allowed for needs to be expressed in terms of dialogue between the populations and the administrative and social services. These debates involved the local elected representatives, State representatives and civil society organisations. They took place in all the municipalities, with the exception of the three municipalities which were awaiting approval of the administrative accounts. All the administrative accounts and balance sheets were broadcast on local radio stations. In terms of improving the skills of the elected representatives, the Regional Authority Training Centre, the body responsible for training elected representatives and regional authority officials, used its partners to lead the training sessions. The partners are the Timbuktu Regional Development Agency for the Timbuktu and Taoudéni regions (the Gao region was not part of the project's decision-making training) and Global Alliance for Chronic Diseases and Integrated and Sustainable Environmental Management Association for the Gao and Ménaka regions. For all four regions of intervention, 1 880 elected representatives and municipal officials have received training: 1 020 officials for the Timbuktu (54.25%), Taoudéni (3.03%), Gao (39.84%) et Ménaka (2.87%) regions.

Project evaluation

Relevance: The objectives of RELAC II are aligned and entirely consistent with national, sectoral and local policies. Furthermore, the targeting of the different social components (between men and women, nomads and sedentary people, displaced/refugee populations) and a better inclusion of young people has contributed to the relevance of the project. The nexus/development approach developed by the project is appropriate to the situation in Northern Mali, with its precarious post-conflict situation which requires both emergency/humanitarian and development responses. Certain limitations to the project's relevance, revealed at the halfway point, have been resolved, notably the alignment of the microprojects with the social, economic and cultural development plans and the formulation of guidelines for identifying and selecting microprojects. However, caution is in order in terms of reducing poverty. With just a few months to go until the end of the project, there are no indications as to whether the project has impacted to any significant extent on reducing poverty and, more particularly, whether this impact might be long-term. Implementation of the microprojects and strengthening of the local authorities are not sufficient on their own to eradicate the vulnerability of the populations. **The final evaluation mission believes that the project has above-average relevance with better than predicted performances (score 2)**, although insufficient consideration has been given to local absorption capacities. It also believes the project could have developed a theory of change and defined a strategy for operational continuity in an event of advanced degradation, and notes that questions have been asked about the relevance of a number of rehabilitation projects instead of opting for new constructions.

Effectiveness: The progress of the activities connected to result 1 is generally satisfactory, in as much as 98 microprojects have been selected and formulated out of the 120 microprojects set down in the Financial and Technical Document. Among these 98, 11 microprojects have not yet started their first operational cycle due to delays in the practical application and initiation of the microprojects. In terms of investment, while the total investment varies by region, the average financial investment per microproject is essentially the same whatever the region. Overall, the Timbuktu region microprojects are economically profitable, with the exception of the fattening microprojects, which were affected by the foot-and-mouth epidemic. In contrast, the microprojects of the other regions are faced with major issues concerning their economic profitability. In general terms, natural risks and the poor quality of the technical documents have impacted on the profitability of the microprojects. Technical monitoring, as it stands, has been unable to tackle these difficulties. The project has, however, resolved two of the three points of special attention identified at the halfway point (the land status of the microprojects and the partnership agreements with the technical departments). Measures in terms of environmental risks are virtually all in place. While the economic results are insufficient, the social effects remain effective in terms of the role of the project leaders (including women and young people), organisational momentum, building the capacities of project leaders, "working together", etc. The project has also recorded considerable achievements for the other two results in terms of training the project leaders and the local elected representatives and officials of the regional authorities. However, there is no training plan for the elected representatives and municipal officials (identification of needs, objectives and expected results, implementation strategy, post-training monitoring, etc.). A list of needs on its own is not sufficient. Furthermore, expressing a need still depends on knowing what training content exists. Establishing needs on a requests-based approach means that the training needs expressed can be included, but has the drawback of leaving aside other training needs that could be useful and relevant. The mission has also revealed the low participation of women in the public discussions and debates on the services provided to the municipalities. The report also identifies limitations in terms of the training process. Elsewhere, the facilities and infrastructure needs of the local authorities have been satisfied, despite noting significant delays in the delivery of certain infrastructures. The project has also been effective in supporting the scheduled debates in all the municipalities. **The final evaluation mission believes that the results predicted have been achieved, but there are opportunities for improvement (score 3).**

Efficiency: The project has demonstrated its capacity to absorb the financial resources made available. In fact, **the rate of disbursement (disbursed/budget) was 81% in June 2019.** This rate is even more significant as it is in a post-conflict context and three months before the project's conclusion. The project saw a strong momentum in its second phase since during its mid-term evaluation, the execution rate was 21.9% of the programmed funds. In terms of the financial investments made, it is highly likely that all financial resources will be put to good use. The share of resources dedicated to funding the project interventions is 68.10% compared with 31.37% for management (operational costs). In other words, the project's financial resources have been used as a matter of priority to meet the needs of the local authorities and populations. The project has also met its commitments in terms of deliverables, and has demonstrated its efficiency in awarding contracts and managing resources. The project's efficiency is nonetheless limited by two key factors:

- cost overruns arising, in large part, from the insufficiencies identified in the technical studies of the microprojects (overall budget overrun of 15.8% and an overrun of 30.16% on investments);
- delays in the delivery of certain social infrastructures and facilities and the late start of the operational phase of certain microprojects and even disruptions to the production cycle.

The final evaluation mission believes that the project has demonstrated its efficiency, but there are opportunities for improvement, and has taken account of the external constraints which must be faced by the project (efficiency therefore scored between 2 and 3).

Sustainability: Several factors favour the sustainability of the project:

- the community rootedness of the development actions;
- the training of the heads of the project management organisations, the local elected representatives and the regional authority personnel, in addition to the training of skilled local repairers in charge of maintaining the facilities acquired within the scope of the project;
- the institutional portage of the municipalities, the “hands-on” policy, collaboration with the decentralised State technical departments, the involvement of local organisations and, ultimately, the conclusion of contracts with local suppliers and providers;
- the support of certain associations in improving their governance and operation and their transition to cooperative societies;
- the contributions of the beneficiaries (in cash and in kind) to the implementation of the microprojects are a sign of the populations' commitment to the future management of investments.

However, other factors could limit the sustainability of the project:

- the lack of financial resources of the municipalities to correctly put to use the skills transferred to them since 2002 in the areas of education, health and hydraulics. Added to this is the fact that virtually no taxes and duties have been collected since the crisis broke out and the municipalities are unable to establish the budgetary provisions to maintain and renew the facilities and infrastructures rehabilitated by the project;
- the low economic profitability of a significant number of microprojects, particularly in the Gao region, which poses a threat of demotivation in producers;
- the methods by which the management organisations manage the microprojects are not always propitious to their sustainability, notably the criteria for apportioning the revenues generated by the microprojects, which are unfavourable to the organisations (for certain microprojects, the members share almost all the revenues) and even the depreciation policies;
- the lack of resilience of communities in the face of climatic risks.

The final evaluation mission believes that the results predicted have been achieved, but there are opportunities for improvement (score 3).

Various additional specific issues are analysed in the evaluation report:

Funding federative projects targeting young people	To correct the lack of consideration of the employment needs of young people, RELAC II funded 11 economic microprojects led exclusively by young people, six for the Timbuktu region and five for the Gao region.
Supporting the transition of the associations to cooperative societies	The candidate associations were supported by the Gao and Timbuktu offices (information, awareness-raising) and placed in contact with the competent technical departments. For the Gao region, 11 out of the 35 target associations have transitioned to cooperative societies, 12 have begun the transition process and out of three non-compliant associations, two are in the process of formalisation. In the Timbuktu region, 14 out of a total of 25 associations have transitioned to cooperative societies.
Improving mobilisation and contracting conditions with State officials	RELAC II signed 11 protocols with the State technical departments, directly seeking the availability of State technical officials from the regional governors. Their lack of action is still for some, however, lamentable.
Conducting environmental and social impact studies and the securing the land sites housing the microprojects	11 environmental and social impact studies sanctioned by 11 notices have been conducted. The project supported the associations in securing the land sites housing the microprojects.
Reviewing the training and post-training monitoring systems	RELAC II has broken new ground by developing a system for the post-training monitoring of the participants of the training seminars. While post-training monitoring is being implemented successfully for the Timbuktu region, the same does not apply for the Gao region. A number of participants in this region boycotted the post-training monitoring sessions on the pretext of the absence of financial funding by the project.
Comparing RELAC II and other projects implemented in post-conflict zones	The plus points: RELAC II offers a diversified portfolio of activities (infrastructure rehabilitation, funding of economic microprojects, capacity-building, etc.) and proposes participatory intervention approaches. The project reacts relatively swiftly to meet local demand. However, RELAC II is not aligned with the national procurement and contracting policy. The project lacks presence in the so-called "red zones". Preoccupations shared by various projects stand out: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the evolution of collaboration with local/national players: flexibility needed; • the project/microproject selection criteria; • the implementation strategies in "red zones"; • coordination with players in Northern Mali is still in its infancy.
Avenues to contribute to stabilising the northern area	Multiple challenges must be faced: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • re-establish the authority of the State; • redefine public policies by placing the most pressing needs at the heart of priorities; • find a temporary solution to the unemployment of young people and the absence of economic activity. These challenges seem to have been well addressed by the Local Economic Development and Conflict Prevention project's Financial and Technical Document.
Improving the RELAC II monitoring and capitalisation system	Despite a good evaluation and monitoring system, not all the tools are systematically used. Insufficiencies were identified during the evaluation mission's field visits.
Knowledge sharing and management	In terms of knowledge management, many actions have been carried out and shared with local authorities and public players. The project is endeavouring to document its practices and draw on the principal lessons of its intervention so they can be used to define future projects

The final evaluation highlights 3 lessons learned:

1. rigour, fairness and transparency must guide all interventions;
2. flexibility must apply to interventions in volatile situations;
3. the importance of a strong State leadership to drive forward and coordinate the many interventions subject to different rules.

Ten recommendations have been raised and developed in the report:

1. improve the formulation of the Financial and Technical Document, completing it with a theory of change and a risk management strategy;
2. strengthen the project governance;
3. consolidate and improve the contracting lessons learned;
4. foster the funding of integrated projects with the support of the Local Economic Development and Conflict Prevention project to better account for the insufficiencies of the RELAC II economic microprojects;
5. improve the microproject formulation, selection and approval process;
6. improve the capacity-building system of the elected representatives and officials of the regional authorities;
7. better incorporate the Regional Development Agencies into the project's activity training and monitoring system;
8. improve the practices of the operational teams and providers based on results-based management;
9. improve the intervention support and evaluation and monitoring system;
10. go beyond the simple identification of risks (environmental, security, etc.) to develop resilience strategies and compensatory measures (e.g. new cultural techniques and early warning actions).